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ABSTRACT

The pupil appraisal process in Louisiana special education services features resource teams from eight universities throughout the state working through interagency agreements between the universities and the State Department of Education. The university teams provide technical assistance, annual compliance reviews, and inservice workshops on appraisal issues. All parties involved benefit: university programs are strengthened by field experiences, public school practitioners learn about new trends and materials, and local school boards become aware of other districts' efforts to solve similar situations. The psychologist and the assessment teacher functions on the University Resource Teams are especially important. (CL)

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University Involvement In Pupil Appraisal Services In Louisiana Public Schools

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UNIVERSITY INVOLVEMENT IN PUPIL APPRAISAL SERVICES IN LOUISIANA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Traditionally, students in Louisiana public schools were evaluated for special education services by appraisal teams located in universities throughout the state. The evaluations generally consisted of a battery of standardized tests administered to each child. Little information was obtained about the everyday performance of the student and the local school systems played a very small role in the evaluation.

University appraisal teams were disbanded in 1980 by legislative action in favor of school-based appraisal teams. Simultaneously, university Special Education Resource Teams, the focus of this paper, were established to assist in the implementation of Louisiana's pupil appraisal model.

The pupil appraisal model received legislative support whereby local school systems were allotted positions for assessment teachers, psychologists, and social workers based on the number of teachers in the system. Speech pathologists serve the dual role of assessment and therapy and are allotted according to the number of children identified as needing speech therapy.

Louisiana's pupil appraisal services are an integral part of the total instructional program of each local school system. Pupil appraisal personnel are child advocates and assist students to remain in and profit from the regular education program. Prior to and as an integral component of an evaluation, appraisal personnel provide support services in an attempt to keep the student in regular education classes. Support services are initially provided by School Building Level Committees (SBLC) and, if problems continue, appraisal personnel provide additional suggestions for interventions before considering an individual evaluation.

School Building Level Committees are generally composed of school personnel such as principals, guidance counselors, regular and special education teachers; and the support services consist of teacher consultations, parent counseling, behavior management, instructional interventions and modifications.

If a student appears to need services in addition to those offered through regular education, a referral is forwarded to pupil appraisal for individual consideration. Included in this referral is information concerning sensory screening, educational screening and descriptions of interventions attempted by the child's teacher. The student then receives a comprehensive evaluation by appropriate pupil appraisal personnel to determine eligibility for special education. During the evaluation, emphasis is placed on interventions, classroom-based systematic observations, and gathering of relevant data from all sources. Recommendations for instructional modifications and related services are also included in the evaluation report. Evaluation requirements are explained in detail in a Pupil Appraisal Handbook (Bulletin 1508) distributed by the Louisiana Department of Education.

Development and Function of University Special Education Resource Teams in the Louisiana Pupil Appraisal Process.

Legislative action in 1980 created university Special Education Resource Teams at eight universities throughout the state. Interagency agreements between the state department and the respective universities provide operating guidelines for the teams. Each team consists of a minimum of four special education faculty positions who function as members of a multidisciplinary team for 50% of their time. Each university team works closely with State Department Pupil Appraisal Supervisors and pupil appraisal personnel in local school systems. Louisiana school districts are divided into regions and university teams are responsible for a designated pupil appraisal region within their geographic area.

The university teams provide technical assistance, annual compliance reviews and in-service workshops on appraisal issues within their designated region.

They also assist state department personnel when monitoring pupil appraisal systems in school districts outside their designated service area. University resource team members aid in the professional growth of public school appraisal personnel and supervise unlicensed personnel within their own disciplines. Additionally, all university resource teams meet as a group with the Louisiana Department of Education personnel six times annually and submit written monthly reports of their activities.

Certain advantages to the unique concept of university resource teams become immediately obvious. For the first time a feedback-loop is established between agencies involved in regulation-training-practice, which corresponds to State Department of Education - Universities - Public Schools. The universities provide up-to-date technical assistance in public schools and, in turn, learn from the schools the practical problems of application. The university can then improve its own training programs to reflect the practical realities of application and can also pass this information from the field back to the state department to improve the implementation of regulations. The liaison activities of the university resource teams provide an excellent opportunity for the development of good working relationships between the state department, universities and public schools.

The advantage of the university resource team to the school-based appraisal practitioner is that the latter can be made aware of new diagnostic materials and can more easily maintain state-of-the-art expertise. Appraisal personnel are no longer isolated within the practices of one school district, but can be involved in a state-wide network of communication regarding procedures and improvements.

The advantage of the university resource team to the local school board is increased communication. If a pattern of problems is obvious across several school boards, then the resource team can communicate a successful solution from one parish to another. If a lack of skills in any particular content area becomes obvious,

any of the four members of the resource team or the school board can initiate a request for courses from the university to be offered in that parish to meet that particular need.

The university resource teams are multidisciplinary and diverse disciplines may exist from one university to another, but all the teams have employed at least one educational assessment professional and one school psychologist. The interdisciplinary involvement of the university resource team members provides a solid foundation to assess the efficiency of local pupil appraisal procedures. While the authors consider all disciplines important to the overall functioning of the team, only the roles of the psychologist and assessment teacher will be discussed in detail.

The Role of the University Resource Team Psychologist.

The psychologist shares the consultative and in-service tasks of the other members of the team but also encumbers very specific supervisory duties which are legally mandated. The Louisiana Board of Examiners of Psychologists requires that all individuals working in the capacity of a psychologist, whether working for public agencies or not, be either licensed or be supervised by a licensed psychologist. This requirement carries the force of law and specifically states that supervision must be at least one hour per week face-to-face in the service delivery setting. Further, the supervisor must be available to the supervisee at the point of decision-making, shall have sufficient contact with clients, and shall be accountable for the planning, course and outcome of the supervisee's work.

If the local school districts have not initiated supervision contracts with a private licensed psychologist, then the psychologist on the university resource team is responsible for the practice of all unlicensed psychologist in the team's designated area. The supervising psychologist represents the profession of psychology and, because he or she is not an employee of the local school district, is free to communicate needs of a professional nature to the administrative staff of the local system.

Much as an ombudsman, the supervising psychologist may use good reason and common sense to advocate a position, but has no recourse to decisions made within the local school district.

Because the supervising psychologist does not directly benefit by an administrative decision, he may be perceived to be a less biased and more objective party. Further, if he has maintained good working relationships with school administrators, the supervising psychologist is often accorded an above-average amount of status and/or credibility because of his university position. In some cases, where the demands of an employee would not be listened to, the advice of a third party is. Many times, the advice of the supervising psychologist may be requested by school administrators at the planning stage because of the breadth of his experience in the other school districts.

The psychologist may assist as a recruiter in trying to find qualified personnel for school boards lacking sufficient staff. He may act as a personnel officer in evaluating the professional qualifications of applying psychologists when requested to do so by administrators of local school systems. He may at times act as judge and arbitrator in complicated clinical cases. He may act as an editor when reading psychological reports and, in that capacity, becomes a literary critic.

But in many ways the most important role of the supervising psychologist is as counselor, confidante, and friend to the psychologist in the local school district. The support and encouragement of a colleague can provide the strength for the practitioner to go the extra mile.

All the varied tasks of the supervising psychologist may be classified into two categories: "Sit-Down" activities and "Walk-Through" Activities. Sit Down activities consist of any one-to-one activities between the supervisor and the supervisee, usually in the supervisee's office. These activities consist of reviewing case histories, the reading of reports, the inspection of raw data,

and discussion of both diagnostic and treatment techniques. Discussion may also be in areas of working conditions, professional issues, and the practitioners feelings and frustrations. Walk-Through activities would be those which involve the supervisor accompanying the practitioner to the schools and either observing or assisting the practitioner in his everyday duties. Observation of the practitioner's testing skills or communication skills with school personnel gives the supervisor the opportunity to provide feedback to the practitioner which would not be secured in any other way. Further, when the practitioner is confronted with a difficult task in the field, the support of the supervisor may increase the credibility of his recommendations.

The tasks to be performed by the resource team psychologist are extensive and challenging. He must maintain state-of-the-art expertise and, accordingly, must continually in-service himself at conferences, workshops, and through reading. He must be humble enough to accept that each one of his supervisees knows more about some area of psychology than he does and to be flexible enough to know when to learn instead of teach.

The Role of the University Resource Team Assessment Teacher.

The university resource team assessment teacher functions as an educational specialist and communicates with all members of local pupil appraisal teams in the designated school districts, concentrating primarily on the performance of the school-based assessment teachers. The local pupil appraisal assessment teacher gathers information from teachers, parents and others; observes the child in school settings; administers formal and informal measures of educational and/or developmental status and reports findings as well as suggestions and teaching strategies to those involved with the child.

Louisiana teachers are certified as assessment teachers after meeting the

requirements for: 1) a Master's degree in Elementary or Secondary Education, Special Education, Early Childhood or Child Development; 2) a minimum of a Type B teaching certificate (basic teaching certificate with three years teaching experience) with at least one year of classroom teaching in an area of Special Education; 3) certification in at least two areas of special education, one of which must be Learning Disabilities; and 4) at least twenty-seven semester hours in specific courses in diagnosis and remediation of reading problems, applied learning theory, behavioral intervention strategies, consulting teacher strategies, precision assessment and diagnostic/prescriptive strategies, test theory and educational diagnosis, and a supervised internship.

Determining perceived needs of assessment teachers at the local level led to the administration of need assessment surveys in several of the regions. Table 1 contains a survey administered in one of the regions and Table 2 provides the hierarchy of averaged responses to the survey in Table 1.

TABLE 1

PUPIL APPRAISAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

	NOT NEEDED				NEEDED
1. Reviewing, evaluating and keeping me informed regarding new tests, books and materials on assessment and diagnostics.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Answering questions regarding Bulletin 1508 and State Department of Education interpretation.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Compliance Review, including review of Integrated Reports.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Suggesting educational assessment tests.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Providing assurance that I am on the right track, etc. (or suggesting ways to get there).	1	2	3	4	5
6. Review and discuss specific problem cases.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Providing updating information on exceptionalities.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Assistance regarding School Building Level Committees.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Information on systematic observational skills.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Information on intervention strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Information on consultation techniques.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Information on Team building: facilitating inter-disciplinary cooperation.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Information on case management.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Inservice to regular classroom teachers. (State need)	1	2	3	4	5
15. Inservice to administrators. (State need)	1	2	3	4	5

Best day and time to meet with you _____

Preferred method for information to be presented:

____Individual consultation ____All parish assessment teachers together

____Handouts ____Regional assessment teachers together

TABLE 2

HIERARCHY OF AVERAGED RESPONSES TO PUPIL APPRAISAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

RANK	DESCRIPTION OF PERCEIVED NEEDS	AVERAGE
1.	Compliance Review including review of Integrated Reports.	(4.50)
2-5.	Reviewing, evaluating and keeping me informed regarding new tests, books, and materials on assessment and diagnostics.	(4.33)
	Answering questions regarding Bulletin 1508 and State Department of Education interpretation.	
	Providing assurance that I am on the right track, etc. (or suggesting ways to get there).	
	Information on intervention strategies.	
6.	Providing updating information on exceptionalities.	(4.25)
7-8	Suggesting educational assessment tests.	(4.08)
	Review and discuss specific problem cases.	
9.	Information on systematic observational skills.	(3.75)
10.	Information on consultation techniques.	(3.66)
11.	Information on case management.	(3.53)
12.	Information on Team building: facilitating interdisciplinary cooperation.	(3.42)
13.	Assistance regarding School Building Level Committees.	(3.08)
14.	Inservice to administrators.	(2.88)
15.	Inservice to regular classroom teachers.	(2.77)

The results of the survey indicated that university resource team assessment teachers could be of greater service to local assessment teachers in the areas of: 1) Compliance reviews which provide feedback on whether state pupil appraisal regulations are being adhered to; 2) Keeping abreast of new tests, books and materials on assessment and diagnostics; 3) Providing intervention strategies; 4) Providing updating information on exceptionalities; and 5) Suggesting educational assessment tests and discussing specific problem cases.

While Table 2 represents a composite picture, all assessment teachers did not perceive similar needs and thus the university resource team assessment teacher's field work may vary both between parishes, and within parishes. Additi ally, there exists a potential for disparity between needs as perceived by the local assessment teacher and those perceived by the university resource team assessment teacher. In the final analysis, the service the school districts actually receive are an amalgamation of the perceived needs of the system and the skills and willingness of the university resource team member to respond to the school district's request.

Problems Inherent in the University Resource Team Concept.

As previously noted, members of university resource teams serve in two half-time positions, half-time university teaching and half-time providing technical assistance to local school districts. This leads to the "No Man Can Serve Two Half-Masters" syndrome. University resource team faculty not only have a half-time teaching load, but also have a full-time compliment of service on university committees and full-time office hours and advising schedule and, in addition, are expected to conduct research, publish and make other contributions to the department, university and community. From the perspective of the local school districts, there is likely to be the general perception that even more contact with the university resource team faculty is necessary for sufficient service.

Since the university resource team is consulting and not testing, there is a tendency to forget nuances and critical information about specific tests and their administration and interpretation which leads to the "I Had Two Years of French in College, But in Paris They all Laughed" syndrome. In the best of situations, this requires vigilance and time to maintain sufficient skills to be of real service to appraisal personnel in the local school districts. At worst, it means that the university resource team might be in the position of knowing less than those whom they presume to advise - a humbling situation indeed.

Finally, there is the "Xerxes Connection", "Kill the Messenger" or "No Noose is Good News" syndrome. Since a large portion of the functioning in the field depends on the relationship and goodwill developed between university resouce teams and local personnel, there might be a tendency toward caution about criticism in some areas. The problem becomes one of trying to treat the patient gently enough so that the patient doesn't refuse service.

University resource team members take a long view regarding change. The members realize it may take months to establish a fully trusting communicative relationship with some local appraisal personnel, and perhaps even longer before some will be able to accept constructive criticism to implement needed improvements in services.

In summary, the university resource teams provide unique advantages to the local school systems, to the state department as well as to the university. The local school systems receive immediate feedback on technical pupil appraisal problems, as well as relevant in-service presentations. The school systems are provided compliance reviews by university resource teams without the awkwardness of an official state department monitoring. A "spirit of unity" is developed within a region between local pupil appraisal personnel and university staff, whereby state

department supervisors are more easily convinced to look more closely at potential problem areas.

University resource teams assist the state department with the implementation of the Pupil Appraisal Model. Cooperative monitoring of pupil appraisal procedures in school districts outside of the university resource team's designated service area, provides excellent opportunities for developing positive relationships between the state department and university special education faculty.

The employment of the equivalent of at least two full time faculty within special education departments is the primary advantage to the participating universities. The liaison efforts of university resource teams provide opportunities for interdisciplinary involvement among team members as well as the development of a feedback-loop between agencies involved in pupil appraisal regulations, training, and practice. The university personnel preparation programs can reflect the practical realities of pupil appraisal application and in turn can suggest needed regulations to the state department. Ultimately, the multi-faceted role of university resource teams involving teaching, consulting and advising provides a unique opportunity to improve initial services for handicapped individuals.